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STAT

31,000 Assassins

INSIDE SOVIET MILITARY INTELLIGENCE
By Viktor Suvorov. 193 pp. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. $15.95.

By David Wise

SPYING for the G.R.U., the Soviet military intelligence service, must be a dreary affair. Its officers work hard — they may even have stolen the plans for an American nuclear submarine and NASA's space shuttle — but the K.G.B., the Soviet Union's civilian intelligence service, gets all the credit.

It matters not that Richard Sorge, who may be the only modern spy to appear on a postage stamp, was a G.R.U. agent. (Sorge ran a highly successful Soviet spy network in Japan but was caught and executed by the Japanese during World War II.) Or that Oleg Penkovsky, the celebrated Soviet spy who was also working for the West (and was caught and executed by the Russians) was a G.R.U. agent. Compared to the K.G.B., who's ever heard of the G.R.U.?

A Soviet defector from the G.R.U., the pseudonymous Viktor Suvorov, has set out to remedy the situation by providing a history and description of the objectives, organization and techniques of the Soviet military intelligence arm. According to the publisher, Mr. Suvorov, the author of a previous book on the Red Army, now lives in Great Britain, "where his new identity and exact whereabouts are kept a closely guarded secret."

The C.I.A., Britain's M.I.6 or even the publisher could at least have provided him with the help of a writer. Most of "Inside Soviet Military Intelligence" reads like instructions written in Cyrillic for assembling an enormous machine. Unhappily, Mr. Suvorov's handbook is therefore very slow going, although with patience, sifting and panning, the text yields a few nuggets.

Among the more interesting are the assertions that the G.R.U. budget is bigger than the K.G.B.'s, although the G.R.U. itself is not, and that most Soviet cosmonauts spend about half their time in space on tasks for the G.R.U. Mr. Suvorov correctly identifies Gen. Peter I. Ivashutin as the director of the G.R.U. The 75-year-old army general has headed it since March 1963, which must make him the longest-reigning chief of a major intelligence service, East or West.

Mr. Suvorov also describes *dachas* around Moscow where Soviet "illegals" — spies inserted into another country without benefit of diplomatic or official cover — are trained by immersion in the culture and customs of the country for which they are headed. They wear the appropriate clothes, eat the appropriate food and listen to tape recorders that "continuously broadcast news from the radio programmes" of the target country.

"It is quite obvious," Mr. Suvorov writes, "that after a number of years of such training, the future illegal knows by heart the composition of every football team, the hours of work of every restaurant and nightclub, the weather forecasts and everything that is going on in the realm of gossip as well as current affairs, in a country where he has never been in his life."

His most sensational charge — one he made earlier this year in a United States Army journal — is that the G.R.U. has *Spetsnaz*, or special purpose, forces whose mission in wartime is to seek out and kill Western political and military leaders. A *Spetsnaz* brigade, he claims, consists of "1,300 professional cutthroats" ready to perform such chores. Since Mr. Suvorov says there are 24 intelligence directorates in the G.R.U., each with a *Spetsnaz* brigade, he seems to be suggesting that the Russians have 31,200 trained killers ready to turn loose on the United States or any other enemy.

The number does seem a trifle high. But of course, allegations of this sort raise a basic question endemic to almost everything written about espionage, especially works by defectors: How much is true? And how much is part of the endless game playing between the United States and Soviet intelligence services?

One is struck by the similarities in some respects between the intelligence agencies of both sides. Mr. Suvorov complains that the Russian services provide correct information but cannot persuade the Soviet leadership of its accuracy; in the end, the chief of the G.R.U. tailors his views to fit policy. It doesn't sound all that different from the C.I.A. □

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